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THE THEORY OF IMITATION IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY.¹

MOST prominent among the results of the attempt to apply psychology in the interpretation of social phenomena is the theory of imitation, formulated first by M. Gabriel Tarde² in France and later, but independently, by Professor J. Mark Baldwin³ in this country. Among all the theories of the nature and process of human society this "imitation theory" is today most widely accepted and most in the public eye. It enjoys such enviable popularity, indeed, that it is expounded, not only by professors of sociology and psychology in our colleges and universities, but by many of the teachers of psychology and pedagogy in our secondary schools. Such a theory, which has gained so wide an acceptance in a brief time, deserves the careful examination and candid criticism of every social thinker; and such this paper will endeavor to give it.

Professor Baldwin's statement of the theory diverges slightly, though immaterially, from M. Tarde's statement. For this reason, as well as on account of its priority in time, M. Tarde's formulation of the theory may be advantageously given first.

¹ Read at the meeting of the Western Philosophical Association, Lincoln, Neb., January 2, 1901.

² *Les Lois de l'Imitation*, 1890; *La Logique sociale*, 1895; *Les Lois sociales*, 1898.

³ *Mental Development in the Child and the Race*, 1895; *Social and Ethical Interpretations in Mental Development*, 1897.

It is worthy of note, however, before consideration of M. Tarde's and Professor Baldwin's views, that they approached their subject from different sides. Professor Baldwin, as is well known, arrived at his conclusions from the side of individual psychology, through study of the mental development of the child; while M. Tarde reached his theories from the sociological side, through study of the phenomena of crowds, crazes, fads, fashions, and crime. He saw that the underlying fact in these social phenomena — namely, the process of suggestion and imitation — could be generalized and used as the basis of a system of social philosophy. The repetition of the act of one person by another under the influence of suggestion offered, he thought, "the key to the social mystery."¹ The influence of one mind upon another was explained by this suggestion-imitation process, and consequently all changes and movements in society.² "Society is imitation," he says, "and imitation is a species of somnambulism."³ Moreover, imitation is "the elementary social phenomenon,"⁴ "the fundamental social fact;"⁵ it is the criterion of the social and alone constitutes society. "The unvarying characteristic of every social fact whatsoever is that it is imitative. And this characteristic belongs exclusively to social facts."⁶ The unity of society, both on its functional and structural sides, M. Tarde argues, is wholly due to the process of imitation. "This minute interagreement of minds and wills, which forms the basis of social life . . . is not due," he maintains, "to organic heredity . . . ; it is rather the effect of that suggestion-imitation process which, starting from one primitive creature possessed of a single idea or act, passed this copy on to one of its neighbors, then to another, and so on."⁷

Consistently with the above positions, M. Tarde declares that all the activities of men in society, from the satisfying of simple organic needs to the inventions of science and art, are in one way or another outcomes of the process of imitation.⁸

¹ *Social Laws*, p. 47.

⁵ *Social Laws*, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³ *Les Lois de l'Imitation*, p. 95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 39.

⁴ *La Logique sociale*, p. 76.

Ibid., pp. 39-41.

There is not a word that you say which is not the reproduction, now unconscious, but formerly conscious and voluntary, of verbal articulations reaching back to the most distant past, with some special accent due to your immediate surroundings. . . . even your very originality itself is made up of accumulated commonplaces, and aspires to become commonplace in its turn.¹

Just as all the phenomena of the universe can be reduced to the three forms, repetition, opposition, and adaptation, the last two of which are in reality only outcomes of the first;² so all the phenomena of human society can be reduced to three corresponding forms—imitation, conflict, and invention. But the last two are again merely outcomes of the first; for conflict is but the interference of two dissimilar waves of imitation, and invention but the union of two harmonious imitations.³ Finally, M. Tarde thinks that the process of imitation going on throughout society may be formulated into two general laws. The first is that all imitations tend to spread throughout society in a geometrical progression, and do so spread if interferences in the form of competing imitations are absent.⁴ The second law, already implied in the conditioning of the first, is that imitations are always refracted by their media.⁵ These laws of imitation “are to sociology,” M. Tarde thinks, “what the laws of habit and heredity are to biology, the laws of gravitation to astronomy, and the laws of vibration to physics.”⁶

More careful and more scientific, though not essentially different from M. Tarde's, is the formulation of the imitation theory given by Professor Baldwin. As noted above, Professor Baldwin gathered the material for his theory in child-study. His conclusion from the study of mental development in the child is that “the prime and essential method of his [the child's] learning is by imitative absorption of the actions, thoughts, expressions of other persons;”⁷ further, that “all his personal absorption from his immediate associates is through his tendency

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 41.

⁴ *Les Lois de l'Imitation*, p. 18.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-5, 202-4.

⁶ *Social Laws*, p. 61.

⁷ *Social and Ethical Interpretations in Mental Development*, p. 58.

to imitate;"¹ and, therefore, that "imitation is the method of his personal progress,"² "the essential method of his growth." But if this holds of the individual, it must hold also of society; 'for whether we view society as an aggregation, or as a functional combination, of individuals, it can contain no elements, factors, or forces not discoverable in the individual. The processes of the social life are implied in the processes of individual life. If the principle of imitation will explain fully the method of personal progress, it will also explain fully the method of social progress. Professor Baldwin, therefore, quite properly generalizes his theory of personal growth by imitation and applies it to society. "Society," he tells us, "grows by imitative generalization of the thoughts of individuals."³ Therefore, "imitation is the method of social organization,"⁴ and all progress takes place through society's generalizing by imitation the inventions of individuals. Thus we have a circular process: the individual develops intellectually and morally by imitating the mental attitudes and actions of those about him, while society changes through the continued imitation of the thought of some individual, a "leader" or a "genius."

Here we must note the chief points of divergence of Professor Baldwin's theory from M. Tarde's. Baldwin nowhere says that "society is imitation," that imitation is *the criterion of the social*, as Tarde says. On the contrary, Professor Baldwin distinguishes between the matter, or content, of social organization and the method, or process,⁵ and affirms that imitation has to do exclusively with the latter. Imitation is the method of the social life, but not its content.⁶ This distinction, it may fairly be urged, is implicit in Tarde's writings; but that Professor Baldwin makes it explicit is sufficient testimony to the superior logic and scientific method of his work. Again, Professor Baldwin finds the matter or content of social life in thought,⁷ while M. Tarde *apparently* finds it in beliefs and desires. This, however, is a minor divergence between the two theories, for Professor

¹ *Social and Ethical Interpretations in Mental Development*, p. 100.

² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 478, 479, 507-9.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 487-506.

Baldwin makes beliefs and desires functions of thought.¹ Finally, we have to note that Professor Baldwin develops a clear and consistent theory of the social process as a whole, which Tarde fails to do, however much he labors, and however much may be implied in what he says. Briefly stated, Professor Baldwin's theory may be thrown into four propositions, namely: (1) the matter of social organization is thoughts; (2) the method of their organization is imitation; (3) these thoughts originate with the individual;² (4) later certain of these thoughts are imitated, and so generalized, by society.³

The above, it is believed, is a fair statement of the sociological theories of M. Tarde and Professor Baldwin, stripped of unnecessary details. Without denying or belittling in any way the importance of their contribution to psychological sociology, may we not question the finality of their interpretation of the process of the social life? Is their description of that process a faithful picture of reality? Does it adequately explain the social life, as we know it, on its psychical side? Are there not other elements, other factors, in the process than imitation, which our authors have overlooked? Are there not limitations to the imitation theory, however broadly conceived, which make it profoundly inapplicable in the interpretation of certain phases of the social life? Finally, is not a deeper interpretation of the social life-process possible which shall reconcile imitation with other plainly discernible factors in that process? These are some of the questions which we may legitimately raise without putting ourselves in the light of captious critics; and as our discussion proceeds, answers to some of them may become apparent. We shall confine ourselves mainly to Professor Baldwin's presentation of the theory, inasmuch as it is more fully and more logically developed than M. Tarde's, and rests more upon observed facts.

Passing by the vagueness and "extreme generality" of the term "imitation" as employed by both our authors—though it is well to note that with Tarde it denotes a process at some point of its development "conscious and voluntary," while with

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 455 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 466-8.

Baldwin it is merely the "circular type of reaction,"¹ but still, he seems to think, a "mental" process—the first and most obvious criticism of the theory is the fact that we do not imitate everybody indiscriminately; that we make conscious choice in large measure of the persons whom we shall imitate—imitating usually only those whom we consider our superiors or our equals, and imitating our enemies and inferiors only when we believe that it will be to our advantage to do so. An attempt to explain this fact is, however, made by both our authors. M. Tarde's explanation is that there is always a conflict between different suggestions—"an interference between imitation-rays," to use his own phrase—in the brain of each individual, which is decided upon either *logical* or *teleological* grounds.² Thus the beliefs and desires of the individual, which have been themselves acquired by imitation, are the basis upon which discrimination is made between different examples for imitation.³ Professor Baldwin's explanation is that we imitate those actions, thoughts, and expressions which we can assimilate in the organization of our personal selves.⁴ The basis of our choice, he says, is their "fitness for imitative reproduction and application."⁵ In other words, the basis of our discrimination is simply the habits of imitation which we have already set up, since we can assimilate, reproduce, and make use of only that which is in part already organized into our personality. We imitate, then, according to Professor Baldwin, simply what we have gotten in the habit of imitating; for it must be remembered that according to him imitation is the method by which the personal self becomes organized. Thus, if we have given the capacity to form habits, the process of imitation itself, when viewed in its entirety, Professor Baldwin implies, is the explanation of the selective character of our imitations. This theory is certainly ingenious and

¹ *Mental Development in the Child and the Race*, pp. 217, 264-8, 282, 283, 350, 487.

² *Social Laws*, pp. 64, 65, 135, 136.

³ M. TARDE's book, *La Logique sociale*, is largely given up to a discussion of this question why one copy is imitated rather than another. We must refer to it rather than attempt to give his argument in full. He seems to me, however, to arrive at a formulation of the problem rather than at a true *genetic* explanation.

⁴ *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, pp. 121, 182-4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

is in accord with some psychological teaching of the present time. That it does not satisfy all inquiring minds, however, is evident from the fact that Professor Giddings, in an able review of Professor Baldwin's work,¹ suggests that the real basis of our discrimination in selecting models for imitation is the consciousness of similarity or of "kind." We chiefly imitate, he argues, our similars, especially those who are *like-minded* with ourselves; indeed, we do not receive suggestions at all from creatures wholly unlike ourselves. Men imitate other men, but show little or no tendency to imitate sheep. The consciousness of kind, especially of mental and moral resemblance, evidently comes in to limit and control the process of imitation; it leads to an instinctive discrimination among possible models for imitation and to an instinctive selection of those models whom we believe to be most nearly like ourselves. Therefore Professor Giddings thinks that the principle of "consciousness of kind" should be recognized as another factor in the social process, a factor which limits and modifies the action of the principle of imitation.

The contention seems to us a good one; but why stop with admitting a single other factor in our interpretation of the social process? There are manifestly cases of imitation which the principle "consciousness of kind" does not help to explain, and this Professor Giddings acknowledges. Why, then, limit the social process to the working of these two factors? Are we not dealing all along in this matter of the discrimination and selection of possible models for imitation *with a series of instinctive impulses*, like "consciousness of kind" or organic sympathy,² which condition and form the final basis of the process of discrimination and selection in individual consciousness?

But this brings us to another objection to Professor Baldwin's theory, which it will be well to consider before discussing this last question.

Our second criticism of the imitation theory, as developed by M. Tarde and Professor Baldwin, is that it is impossible to

¹ *Science*, January 6, 1899; also chap. iii in *Democracy and Empire*, 1900.

² Which Professor Giddings identifies with "consciousness of kind" in the third edition of his *Principles of Sociology*.

understand how a single instinct, "the instinct to imitate," has come to dominate the whole process of human society, and alone to constitute the method of all personal and social growth,¹ while many other instincts are plainly discernible determining the associations of animals below man. The theory sets up, in the language of Professor Baldwin himself, "an absolute gulf between man and the animal world in which instinctive equipment in definite directions is supreme,"² and so violates the "doctrine of development" which since Darwin has been the major premise of all scientific thought about man. How explain the enormous development *in man* of the imitative instinct which the imitation theory implies? This Professor Baldwin does not attempt to do, but he evades the difficulty of his position by denying that the associations of animals constitute true societies. Animal associations he terms "companies;" and the difference between companies and societies, he says, is that, while in the former the individuals *feel and act alike*, in the latter the individuals *also think alike*.³ How he gets his knowledge that the individuals of animal societies or groups do not *think alike* Professor Baldwin does not tell us; indeed, the fact that they *feel and act alike*, which he admits, would seem to favor the presumption that they in some measure *also think alike*, since thought is acknowledged to be a function of activity. But the historical objection to such a classification, which makes a break between animal and human societies and estops reasoning from the one to the other, is even more cogent. As Professor Giddings says:

From the standpoint of the observer of animal and primitive human societies, it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish a line of demarcation between the more highly organized bands of animals, like troops of monkeys, or herds of elephants, or bands of wild horses, and the simplest hordes of human beings, like Bushmen or Australian Blackfellows.⁴

Indeed, Professor Baldwin can refuse to consider animal societies only by denying that they are unified at all on the

¹ For Professor Baldwin's argument in this connection see his *Mental Development in the Child and the Race*, chaps. ix-xii.

² *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, p. 237.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 486, 487.

⁴ *Democracy and Empire*, p. 38.

psychical side. If the organization which animal societies reveal is wholly a physiological matter,¹ and not also a matter of feeling, intelligence, and impulse, then Professor Baldwin is justified in leaving them out of consideration in his attempt to give a psychological interpretation of the human social process. If, on the contrary, the unity and organization of animal groups is in some measure psychical, and if human society be supposed to have arisen out of some pre-human form of association, then the burden of showing why human society differs from animal societies in its process of organization rests upon the supporters of the imitation theory.

Let us consider the case of the social insects—the ants, bees, and wasps—to bring out our point still clearer. As is well known, these animals exhibit a marvelous degree of organization in the groups which they form, the division of labor and the corresponding division of individuals into classes among them often surpassing that found in human societies of considerable development. From an objective point of view these groups of insects seem as truly societies as any human groups. Moreover, we cannot well deny to these creatures some degree of mental life, for they are known to show, both as individuals and as groups, considerable power of adaptation in the presence of danger.² Some have even gone so far as to claim that they see among them the beginning of that process of suggestion and imitation³ which M. Tarde and Professor Baldwin make the sole factor in the human social process. However, it is usually recognized that the organization which colonies of these insects exhibit is an outcome of certain habits of coöperation which have become *innate* in the species through a process of natural selection in the course of a long period of evolution. In other words, the societies formed by ants, bees, and wasps are organized upon the basis of instinct. Now, if instinct plays such a

¹ This Professor Baldwin appears to assert, *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, p. 476; but in this case the criticism given at the end of the next paragraph would apply.

² Cf. LUBBOCK, *Ants, Bees, and Wasps*.

³ Cf. GIDDINGS, *Principles of Sociology*, p. 143

rôle in the organization of sub-human societies, and if human societies are admittedly genetically related to these, is it not probable that instinctive impulses have much to do with the organization of human society; and not simply one instinctive impulse, the tendency to imitate, but many? If it be objected that, in so far as the organization of society is a matter of instinct, it is physiological and not psychological, the reply is that then all social organization is physiological, for the tendency to imitate is admitted to be an instinct.¹

Another objection to the theory that imitation constitutes the sole method of social progress comes to light when we consider animal societies. Animal societies are by no means stationary. The changes which take place in them, though not readily observable, cannot be questioned. The high degree of organization of such insect societies as we have just considered is unquestionably to be regarded as the result of a series of gradual adjustments made through a long period of evolution and fixed by natural selection. The organization of sub-human societies would seem, then, to be wholly an outcome of the process of natural selection, and the changes and progress which they exhibit, though perhaps in some measure mediated by the process of suggestion and imitation, seem largely to be due to the working of the same principle. Now, if natural selection be the method of progress in the societies of the animal world, is it not reasonable to suppose that it is also in some measure a factor in the progress of human societies? "Certainly," a defender of the imitation theory might reply; "but natural selection is not a psychical process; it is wholly physical and physiological." This position is, however, not tenable. On the contrary, natural selection is mediated everywhere throughout the higher stages of animal life by certain psychical processes, and in so far is itself a psychical process. Thus sexual selection, now quite generally recognized as a part of the process of natural selection, is largely a conscious process. Even that form of

¹ For Professor Baldwin's argument that the tendency to imitate is a true instinct see his *Mental Development in the Child and the Race*, pp. 261, 290, 356; and also p. v of his preface to GROOS, *Play of Animals*.

social selection which results from the competition of individuals with one another for place and honor in society is recognized by Professor Baldwin as constituting truly a part of the process of natural selection.¹ There is nothing in Professor Baldwin's position in this regard, therefore, to prevent his recognition of natural selection as a factor in the human social process. Indeed, it is to be feared that it is only his ardor for the recognition of imitation and his desire to make a very complex problem unduly simple which prevent him from recognizing natural selection in its psychical aspect as a part of the method of progress of human society coördinate with imitation.²

Our third criticism of the imitation theory of social organization and progress is, then, that it makes no allowance for the influence of various forms³ of natural selection in controlling, guiding, and supplementing the process of imitation. Let us take the organization and evolution of the family to illustrate further our meaning. According to the imitation theory, not only has our present form of the family come down to us solely by imitation, but changes in the form of the family in the past have been accomplished by imitative generalization of some variation, which in turn was an imitative adaptation or combination of forms already existing. Indeed, Professor Baldwin implies that the very process of idealizing the family has been essentially a process of imitation.⁴ On the other hand, Westermarck⁵ and other ethnologists who have investigated the historical and ethnological material bearing upon the evolution of the family hold that the present monogamic form of the family is largely due to a process of natural selection. Other forms of the family have not persisted, they tell us, because individuals and groups which adopted the inferior forms have constantly been eliminated in competition with the individuals and groups

¹ *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, p. 181.

² This seems to be plainly implied in Bagehot's pioneer discussion of the social importance of imitation in his *Physics and Politics*, pp. 89-111.

³ *I. e.*, those which manifest themselves psychically.

⁴ *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, pp. 296 ff.

⁵ *The History of Human Marriage*.

which adopted the superior form. Moreover, the feelings and impulses which led to the formation of monogamic unions, having been found favorable to race survival, have tended more and more to become fixed by heredity, inasmuch as those individuals who did not possess these feelings and impulses would leave no offspring to survive. Thus the picture of the evolution of the family which we obtain from ethnology shows us, not merely the continued imitation of a primitive pattern, but also the constant *elimination* of those who do not conform to the pattern, *plus* the fixing in the race of those instinctive impulses which make conformity to the pattern easy.

Almost any practical social problem would serve for further illustration. Let us take the drink problem. Many social thinkers hold that families which have the appetite for the stronger and more harmful alcoholic drinks are being steadily eliminated, and that a state of society will soon result in which there will survive practically no individuals with the "drink-crave." This theory seems to get some inductive support from the fact that those countries which have had the longest experience with alcoholic beverages have little or no drunkenness. In this case, then, as in the evolution of the family, the process of natural selection appears to come in to limit and control the process of imitation. Like the "consciousness of kind," it serves to make the process of imitation definite or within certain limits. Men imitate one act rather than another, and one mental attitude rather than another, because it is of life-saving advantage to do so. Moreover, and most important of all, the individuals who do not select the right models for imitation are constantly eliminated, and thus natural selection fixes in the race a larger and larger number of instinctive impulses which tend to discharge themselves along one line rather than along another.

The whole drift of our argument against the imitation theory of social order and progress must now be apparent. It divorces the social process from the life-process as a whole. It takes no sufficient account of those deeper characteristics of species and race which come to light in the psychical life of the individual and in the psychical processes of society. It matters

not whether we name these race characteristics "instincts," "impulses," or what not. The important thing is to recognize that race heredity has fixed in us, and is tending more and more to fix in us, through a process of evolution by natural selection, certain coördinations of nerve cells and muscle fibers which tend to discharge in one way rather than in another, and which make personal and social development tend to take one direction rather than another. But to recognize this truth would be fatal to the imitation theory of individual and social development, even in the moderate form in which it is stated by Professor Baldwin. Accordingly, we find Professor Baldwin, almost alone among eminent modern psychologists, refusing to recognize the importance of the innate or instinctive in mental development. James,¹ Dewey, Wundt,² and lately H. R. Marshall³ have all elaborated arguments in the spirit of the doctrine of descent to show the importance of "instinct," or of "innate impulses," in the mental life of man as well as in that of the animals beneath him. But Professor Baldwin says: "The human infant has very few instincts, and these are almost all fitted to secure organic satisfaction."⁴ These instincts, *plus* the "magnificent capacity of learning" by imitation, he thinks, are sufficient to account for the growth of the child into the fully equipped *socius*.⁵ And they are, if the imitation theory of personal development is correct.

But it is evident that Professor Baldwin is using the term "instinct" in quite a different sense from that in which it is employed by the writers above mentioned, and in which it has been used in this paper. With him "instincts" are those "ready-made activities" which manifest themselves in the child at birth or soon after, and which are best exemplified among the

¹ See his famous chapter on "Instinct" (pp. 383-441) in Vol. II of his *Principles of Psychology*.

² See Lecture XXVII in his *Lectures on Human and Animal Psychology*.

³ See chaps. ii and iii in his *Instinct and Reason*. Compare also the chapter on "Play and Instinct" in GROOS, *Play of Animals*, especially pp. 66-76.

⁴ *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, p. 62.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 59.

lower forms of animal life, particularly among the insects.¹ With the psychologists we have named, however, the "instinctive" is practically identified with the "innate," and "instincts" are simply "innate impulses" which tend to discharge themselves in one way rather than in another; they are "*inborn* capacities to act with reference to biological ends;"² they are that part of our race heredity which manifests itself psychically, and hence they may be viewed as "species" or "race habits" in contrast with the *acquired* habits of individuals. In criticism of the narrower view of instinct adopted by Professor Baldwin it may well be urged that the "hard and fast" type of instinct is rarely met with among the higher animals.³ Such animals as the dog, cat, and horse, for example, have almost no instincts which cannot be modified, even utterly changed, by training. Again, "ready-made activities" which are manifest soon after birth are comparatively few among all higher animals; many of their instincts do not ripen until after physical maturity is reached. But, as we said above, *the question is not at all one of terminology*. This cannot be too strongly emphasized with reference to the content of our criticism. It matters not whether we name the psychical aspects of race heredity "instincts" or not. The important thing is whether we recognize or not the part which the "innate," the species or race habit, plays in the mental life of individuals and in the social process. It would be unfair to Professor Baldwin to say that he in no way recognizes the importance of the innate save as has been indicated. Formally he does;⁴ but not in such a manner as to affect his

¹ *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, pp. 61, 62. Professor Baldwin seems to adopt in the main Professor C. Lloyd Morgan's conception of instinct, which makes instinct the "crystallized form" of innate capacity or impulse. See MORGAN, *Habit and Instinct*.

² A definition formulated by Professor G. H. Mead. Compare Schneider's definition: "By instinct we understand the impulse to an action whose end the individual is unconscious of, but which nevertheless furthers the attainment of that end."

³ We cannot but remark Professor Baldwin's inconsistency in arguing that so indefinite and variable a thing as the tendency to imitate is a true instinct, while he holds that definiteness and invariability are the marks of all instinctive activity.

⁴ See especially the chapter on the person's instincts and emotions (chap. vi) in *Social and Ethical Interpretations*.

conclusions, so far as we can see. He in no way embodies such recognition, for example, in his conclusions regarding social organization and progress. It must be remembered, too, that this is an impersonal criticism, a criticism of a theory as popularly accepted, not of a man or of a book. If it were the latter, generosity would compel us to observe that important modifications of Professor Baldwin's conclusions might be found implied in his discussion. Indeed, it would not be difficult to construct from implications scattered throughout his work an argument for the very position taken in this paper.*

The truth for which we are contending, then, is that the process of imitation is at every turn limited, controlled, and modified by a series of instinctive impulses which have become relatively fixed in the individual through a process of evolution by natural selection. Such "instincts" include not only organic sympathy and antipathy (consciousness of resemblance or non-resemblance), the economic instinct, and the like, but a whole series of innate tendencies and mental attitudes, down even to certain innate attitudes toward the universe (instinctive religion) and toward social organization (instinctive morality). If the process of growth by imitation were not limited and modified by innate tendencies, we should expect children of different races, when reared in the same cultural environment, to develop the same general mental and moral characteristics. But the negro child, even when reared in a white family under the most favorable conditions, fails to take on the mental and moral characteristics of the Caucasian race. His mental attitudes toward persons and things, toward organized society, toward life, and toward religion never become quite the same as those of the white. His natural instincts, it is true, may be modified by training, and perhaps indefinitely modified in the course of generations; but the race habit of a thousand generations or more is not lightly set aside by the voluntary or enforced imitation of visible models, and there is always a strong tendency to reversion. The reappearance of voodooism and fetichism among the

* The argument which Professor Baldwin uses against Le Bon's "mob theory of society" might very well be turned against the imitation theory itself.

negroes of the South, though surrounded by Christian influences, is indeed to be regarded as due not so much to the preservation of some primitive copy of such religious practices brought over from Africa as to the innate tendency of the negro mind to take such attitudes toward nature and the universe as tend to develop such religions. But the influence of innate tendencies upon the process of personal and social development is manifest not merely when we consider those broad differences between men which we term racial; it is in evidence also to some extent when we consider national differences, for these are by no means wholly imitative differences. It is even to be seen in family traits; for any group which remains sufficiently isolated long enough to develop by natural selection physiological peculiarities may also develop innate psychical tendencies of its own. Again, it is plainly discernible in the pathological phenomena of the social life; the "instinctive criminal" and the "hereditary pauper" are such, not because of the contagion of vice, crime, and shiftlessness which certain models in society may furnish, but because inborn tendencies lead them to seek such models for imitation rather than others; because they naturally gravitate to a life of crime or pauperism.^{*} Finally, and most important of all, is the influence upon social organization of those innate tendencies which are common to the whole human species—to human nature. These are especially liable to be overlooked, because they vary so slightly in individuals and races. The instinct to imitate is admittedly one of these. But there are many others. Who can doubt that such universal tendencies as the tendency to store up a food-supply, to coöperate in obtaining a food-supply or in repelling the attacks of enemies, to form enduring family groups, to live in communities, to render obedience to elders and authorities, to judge some kinds of action right and other kinds wrong, to communicate by means of articulate sounds, to worship supernatural beings, etc., have long been innate, instinctive, in our species, and are truly matters of race heredity? And if they are instinctive tendencies of the same sort as the tendency to

^{*} It is unnecessary to point out that this is practically the unanimous conclusion of all experts engaged in the study of these classes.

imitate, are they not equally with imitation factors in the social process?

"Yes," some defender of the imitation theory may possibly say; "but your whole argument misses the point. Imitation, as Professor Baldwin clearly states, is simply the functional *method* of personal development and of social organization. There are other factors, doubtless, in social and individual growth, but the method of development remains the same in any case. The negro child may never take on qualitatively the same mental attitudes as the white; but in so far as he progresses toward the mental status of the white, the *method* of his progress is *imitation*." But this is manifestly the very position against which we have been arguing from the beginning of our criticism; it is just this form of statement of the theory to which we object. Imitation is, to be sure, always, in form at least, to be seen in the method of development; but it is imitation multiplied into some other factor or factors which is *the method* of development. If it be admitted that the process of imitation is limited, controlled, and guided by numerous instinctive impulses, or instincts, then it must also be admitted that the unfolding of these instincts is a part of the *method* of growth, both personal and social. Imitation, then, is *but one aspect* of the method of personal progress and of social organization. It is an aspect which is in form, perhaps, always present; but there are other aspects of the method of progress, and these must not be neglected for the construction of sound social theory. The method of progress of the negro child may appear to be a process of imitation; but deep beneath this outward aspect the currents of race heredity are controlling his progress and determining its outcome.

We have said that imitation is an aspect of the process of development which is, *in form* at least, always present. Yet we have to notice that in many instances it is present *only in form*. A kitten brought up in isolation from its kind, if given a spool or a thimble to play with, goes through all the movements necessary to catch a mouse or a bird. It thus spontaneously develops in its play those faculties which guarantee to it later its food-supply.¹ Manifestly there is no real imitation here; for

¹ Cf. GROOS, *Play of Animals*, especially pp. 130 ff.

there have been no models to copy from. What we have is simply hereditary repetition, the unfolding of a race habit, an instinct. In other words, a coördination of nerve cells and muscle fibers, which has become fixed by heredity through natural selection on account of its importance to the species, simply discharges itself in the presence of the appropriate stimulus. This constantly happens in the development of all animals, and so, it is reasonable to suppose, in the process of human development. Thus, much which seems to us imitation in human society may be imitation in form only. The social philosopher in viewing society objectively sees that nearly all the activities of men are imitative *in their outcome*, and he therefore falls easily into the fallacy of believing that they are imitative *in their process*. That this is a fallacious method of reasoning illustrations like the above make evident. Apparently, then, Professor Baldwin and M. Tarde have been guilty of committing what Professor James calls "the psychologists' fallacy,"¹ in that they seem to have judged of the nature of a process by the nature of its outcome. Our last objection to the imitation theory may well be, therefore, that it rests upon a foundation of fallacious reasoning, and will probably not be supported by a more accurate and less superficial investigation of the facts.

Before concluding, two points which have become tolerably clear in the course of our discussion may profitably be noticed. The first is in regard to the true function of imitation in individual and social development. If the positions taken have been in any degree correct, it is evident, as Professor Dewey says, that "imitation comes in to *mediate* the natural tendency."² It helps forward, makes easy, development in certain directions wherein society has furnished models; it thus secures social adjustments with greater quickness and ease, and assures greater uniformity of thought and action throughout a society. The function of the imitation instinct is, then, to mediate the development of other natural tendencies with reference to the conditions of

¹ *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I, p. 196.

² See the valuable review of PROFESSOR BALDWIN'S *Social and Ethical Interpretations* by PROFESSOR DEWEY in the *New World*, September, 1898.

social life; and as such a *mediator* in the adjustment of individuals to each other and to society at large imitation plays a great rôle in human affairs.

The second point has reference to the matter or substance of social organization. If the interpretation of the social life implied in this paper is at all true; if the social process is, indeed, any part of the life-process, then, in the words of Professor Dewey,¹ "society cannot be adequately conceived as an organization of thoughts." "Thoughts are relevant to the life-process—to functioning activities." Thought functions to control and mediate activities on their universal side, while feeling functions to evaluate activities on their individual side. An organization of thoughts or feelings in the abstract is, therefore, impossible, as it presupposes an organization of activities, just as all psychical organization presupposes physiological organization. There is no tendency toward the organization of thoughts (or of feelings) save as there is need of the organization of activities in the process of living. Indeed, the organization of thought exists because of the organizing or organization of functional activities which must be controlled. The family, for example, presents an organized life; it is, as has often been said, "society in miniature." But it is impossible to conceive of the family as simply an organization of thoughts—or even of feelings; it is primarily an organization of activities; and just because it is an organization of activities it develops a wonderful organization of thoughts and feelings, making the unity of its life on the psychical side complete. So of society; primarily an organization of activities, a "functional interdependency," it becomes in time an organization of feeling, and finally an organization of thought. Why Professor Baldwin holds that the matter or substance of social organization consists of thoughts² is difficult to understand, unless he conceives this position to be more strictly in accord with the abstract requirements of the imitation theory of social organization. Herein we agree with him. But in so far as we recognize that the social process is linked with the whole life-process, we must

¹ *New World*, September, 1898.

² *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, pp. 487–506.

recognize that the substance of social organization consists of activities as well as of thoughts and feelings; in brief, that *society organized is life organized*.

To sum up: Our criticisms of the theory that imitation is the method of social organization and progress are, in detail: (1) it cannot sufficiently explain the manifest limitations in the process of imitation without introducing other factors in the method of development; (2) it creates a gulf between human society and the societies of the animal world which are organized upon a basis of instinct; (3) it makes no allowance for the process of natural selection to bring about gradual changes in human society; (4) it rests upon no sufficient basis of ascertained facts, but has apparently been built up by a fallacious method of reasoning. In general, our criticism of the imitation theory is that it makes the social process something apart from the life-process. It does not link, in any definite way, the forces which are molding human society today with the forces which have shaped evolution in the past. Both as M. Tarde and as Professor Baldwin conceive it, the social process is a process which might very well go on in a company of disembodied spirits—in a vacuum! In this sense the imitation theory of the social process is abstract; it makes no sufficient reference to the concrete conditions of human life to give a faithful description of the social reality. In this sense, also, the theory is mechanical; men might be copying machines and still reproduce the social process. For these reasons, finally, the theory is impractical; the economist, the political scientist, and the moralist, on the one hand, can make but little use of the imitation theory in explaining the phases of the social life with which they deal; and, on the other hand, the practical worker, the legislator, the social reformer, and the philanthropist can find but little help in their work from a knowledge of the theory. Only the recognition of the fact that *life* is the subject-matter of social theory, and that human society is an outcome of the entire process of life from its beginning to the present, can create a sound, sane, helpful social philosophy; and to this end social psychology exists.

Social psychology must keep close to life if it is truly to interpret life. Its standpoint must be one of function—that of a developing life-process. The “interdependence of function,” which begins in the biological and ends in the ethical stage of human development, is the fundamental fact of all socio-psychological phenomena. The working unities which organisms formed, at first unconsciously, but finally consciously and purposefully, to sustain and develop the life-process, have alone made possible the development of that *intercerebral* process which in humanity we rightly term, by way of preëminence, the *social* process. The coördination of functioning activities into working unities larger than the individual organism,¹ then, viewed in the light of evolution, explains all socio-psychical phenomena, including suggestion, imitation, consciousness of kind, and the like. Upon this basis a deeper interpretation of the social process which shall reconcile the conflicting theories of the present seems to us possible; while the recognition of the working unity, “the social coördination,” as the fundamental fact with which it deals, should make social psychology at once concrete and practical.

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¹ See the writer's paper on “The Fundamental Fact in Social Psychology,” in the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY, May, 1899.